



THIS WEEK IN IRAQ

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April 14, 2008

Security Situation Improved



U.S. Army Soldiers watch as a flock of sheep moves past them during a cordon and search mission for high value insurgents in Upper Dugmut. About 140,000 U.S. troops will remain in Iraq after the remainder of the surge forces leave Iraq. Photo by Staff Sgt. Sam Bendet.

WASHINGTON — Last year's surge of U.S. troops into Iraq has helped tamp down violence and improve security there, but the situation remains fragile, the top U.S. military and diplomatic officials in Iraq testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday.

Although Iraq "obviously remains a violent country, we do see progress in the security arena," Army Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of Multinational Force Iraq, told committee members.

Petraeus told the committee that he has recommended a 45-day evaluation of the security situation in Iraq after the surge forces have redeployed before decisions are made concerning possible further troop reductions. About 140,000 U.S. troops will remain in Iraq after the remainder of the 30,000 or so surge forces leave Iraq at the end of July.

The post-surge Iraq evaluation process "will be continuous, with recommendations for further reductions made as conditions permit," Petraeus said.

"This approach does not allow establish-

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Shorter Deployments for Soldiers

WASHINGTON — President Bush directed Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates to shorten deployment lengths for U.S. soldiers in Iraq from 15 to 12 months, starting in August.

Bush said he made the decision to reduce the strain on the force and because security improvements in Iraq have allowed for the withdrawal of all five surge combat brigades by the end of July.

He also said that officials would ensure troops have at least a year at home between deployments. The change goes into affect Aug. 1 and will not affect those

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Awarded CMOH



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Soldiers from the 25th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division prepare to engage criminals in the Mahmutiyah market March 30. U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Christopher McKenna, 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT).

Iraqi Army Keeps Peace

CAMP STRIKER — The Iraqi Army commander in Mahmutiyah won't stand for criminal activity in his city.

To that end, Brig. Gen. Ali Jassim Muhammad Hassen Al Frejee, commander of the 25th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, and Lt. Col. William Zemp, commander of 3rd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), worked together recently to make sure that violence seen in Basra wasn't replicated in Mahmutiyah.

Zemp, a native of Hartsville, S.C., said one word sums up the IA successes in the area: leadership. The IA leadership at all levels — company, battalion and brigade — was involved in the mission to secure the city.

"As soon as there were indications of

violence, a curfew was put into effect," Zemp said. Vehicular traffic was suspended in the city, extra checkpoints were established and 14 additional platoons were deployed after hostilities flared March 28.

"(The criminals) were expecting us to only be defending," Ali said. "That was true the first day." After that, Ali said, his Soldiers started taking offensive measures. He said his troops believe it is their duty to pursue anyone who breaks the law.

Before the outbreak of violence, Ali said he brought in all the battalion commanders under his charge and assigned a neighborhood to each as their respective areas of operation. He said this hampered the enemy's ability to function.

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Gates Sees Fewer Troops in Iraq in '09

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said he is confident there will be fewer U.S. troops in Iraq in 2009, but added that the drawdown process has gone somewhat more slowly than he thought it would last year.

This comes as Army Gen. David H. Petraeus returns to Iraq after a week of testimony and meetings in and around the nation's capital to begin what Gates called a "major force realignment" there. Gates and Joint Chiefs Chairman Navy Adm. Mike Mullen met with journalists at the Pentagon April 11.

All five surge brigades are expected to be out of Iraq by the end of July, leaving 15 combat brigades in the country.

By the time the surge drawdown is finished by the end of July, the United States will have rearranged its forces in Iraq, redrawn its battle lines, reduced its presence in some areas and shifted more responsibility to the Iraqi security forces, Gates said. Petraeus then will assess the results of the changes before any other troop reductions are planned.

"The only prudent course of action is to pause the drawdowns for a period of time ... to assess what impact, if any,

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Petraeus Gives High Marks to Maliki's Anti-terror Offensive

WASHINGTON — Iraqi security forces acquitted themselves well, in view of their relative inexperience, in recent fighting against terrorists and criminals in the southern part of the country, including Basra, as well as in parts of Baghdad, the top U.S. military officer in Iraq said.

"The deployment was very impressive, ... certainly not something Iraqis could have done a year ago," Army Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of Multinational Force Iraq, said during a conference call with military analysts.

At the end of March, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the rapid deployment of thousands of Iraqi security forces to Basra to confront illegal militias and criminal elements said to be operating there. The deployment touched off a spike of violence in that city that spread to Najaf, Karbala and southern Baghdad.

The Iraqi forces "did quite well" overall, Petraeus pointed out, although some were reported reluctant to participate. Incomplete Iraqi planning and coordination

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An Iraqi Soldier exits an Iraqi air force C-130 Hercules aircraft after being flown from Basra, Iraq. U.S. Air Force photo.